

Reading 2.1- Meet the Cornish Colony

Follow-up: Activity 1- Portraiture

The Cornish Colony has been called "A Circle of Friends" and as suggested by the encompassing shape of a circle, artists, writers, journalists, landscape architects, musicians and public figures found their way to this rural town of Cornish, New Hampshire for work and recreation. (Locate Cornish on the map.) In the sense of a circle too, friends invited friends to the area, expanding the group until there eventually developed a congenial, creative, like-minded community of over 75 individuals who shared common interests and artistic values, especially a love of classical traditions in literature and art.

It began in the summer of 1885 when Augustus Saint-Gaudens was invited to rent an old (circa 1800) inn called "Huggins Folly" from his friend and lawyer Charles C. Beaman. The sculptor had just begun work on a statue of Abraham Lincoln and Beaman promised that " he would find many examples of Lincoln shaped men in New Hampshire." Saint-Gaudens brought his assistants Frederick MacMonnies and Philip Martiny to work with him in an old hay barn, which he converted, to a studio on the property.



↑ "Huggins Folly in 1885. When he first saw the house he was to rent, Saint-Gaudens said, "All I could imagine was a skeleton dangling from the window, howling in the gale..."



← Saint-Gaudens' summer home, in 1890, after numerous alterations to the house and surrounding property. He renamed the property, "Aspet."

Other sculptors followed including: Saint-Gaudens' brother Louis and his wife Annetta Johnson St.Gaudens, James Earl Fraser, Henry Hering, Harry Thrasher, Herbert Adams, Paulanship, William Zorach, and Frances Grimes. Many of them went on to successful careers of their own. Other artists were soon joining the Colony and inviting their friends to come as well such as painters George deForest Brush, Kenyon and Louise Cox, Henry and Lucia Fuller, Thomas and Maria Dewing who brought Frances Houston and Henry Prellwitz, Henry O. Walker who invited architect Charles A. Platt, who himself invited his etching teacher Stephen Parrish. Maxfield Parrish followed his father a few years later.



↑ *The Wilson family rented novelist Winston Churchill's "Harlakenden Hall" sight unseen, relying on photographs and the judgments of friends. Designed by Charles Platt, the house was surrounded by a square mile of native forest. The property also boasted an unobstructed view of the Connecticut River and Mount Asutney.*

Besides friendship, these artists had something else in common- their education. Many had met one another in art school and, following the tradition of the time, had traveled to Europe to continue their studies. (See the "Education Opportunities" worksheet for more information.) In general the sculptors and painters came first; writers such as dramatist Percy MacKaye and the American novelist Winston Churchill followed. Churchill wrote Richard Carvel, which became one of the most popular novels of the day. Finally, attracted by the intellectual and artistic reputation of the community, others such as patrons of the arts, philanthropists and public officials arrived. These included

Judge Learned Hand and President and Mrs. Woodrow Wilson, who brought the White House to Cornish during the summer seasons of 1913-1915.

Most of these individuals came only for the summer months, but a few stayed year round such as the Saint-Gaudens family after 1900, Stephen Parrish, Maxfield Parrish and Clara Potter Davidge. One artist, Willard Metcalf actually preferred the cold months and painted some of his most beautiful Cornish landscapes during the winter.

These many talented people were the "tastemakers" of their day and each one made significant contributions to the cultural life of America as exemplified by their work. This period in art history has been labeled "The American Renaissance," roughly spanning the years 1876-1917. It is a period in which artists were guided by a vision of idealized beauty inspired by classical themes.



↑ *View of "The Oaks," Maxfield Parrish's home, gardens and three-story studio.*

“What Have You Learned?”



Interpretive Questions: After you have completed “Reading 2.1: Meet the Cornish Colony,” answer the following questions either in writing or in class discussion:

1. Why has the Cornish Colony been described as a "Circle of Friends?" Give examples.
2. What did these artists share in common?
3. Why are these artists considered the "tastemakers" of their day?



Independent Study

What type of art do you like: painting, sculpture, novels, poetry, the theater? Which member of the Cornish community would you like to meet? Choose someone from the Cornish Colony list whose career might interest you. Research and prepare a short (3 minute) introduction of this person to the class (sample: "I would like you to meet..."). Include a brief biography and also information on what contributions this person made to American culture.

Good sources for research include:

- *A Circle of Friends*
- *Footprints of the Past*

ACTIVITY 1- PORTRAITURE

GOALS:

- Students will sharpen observation skills and learn the basic proportions of the human head in order to draw a portrait.
- Portraiture builds on mathematical proportions of the human head and on observation skills. Understanding the process is invaluable in appreciating the creative thinking and choices that an artist constantly makes.

MATERIALS: handout, paper

DURATION: 1 class period

LOCATION: Art, Math, or Language Arts class

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Review with your students that the art of portraiture was important to the Gilded Age and was a typical art form of the American Renaissance, a period in which Americans looked back to the ideals of the classical past. A portrait may be done in any **medium** including drawing, painting, clay, and/or photography, which is most common today. A portrait was a visible sign of success.

Some of the Cornish artists who were especially known for their portraiture include Herbert Adams (sculpture), Louise Cox (painting), Thomas Dewing (painting), Frances Houston (painting) and Augustus Saint-Gaudens (sculpture). The bas-relief portraits of Saint-Gaudens were in great demand and became marks of social distinction. A portrait may also be done in any size ranging from a miniature, which was very popular during the Gilded Age, (see Lucia Fairchild Fuller and Carlota Saint Gaudens) to a life-size rendition.

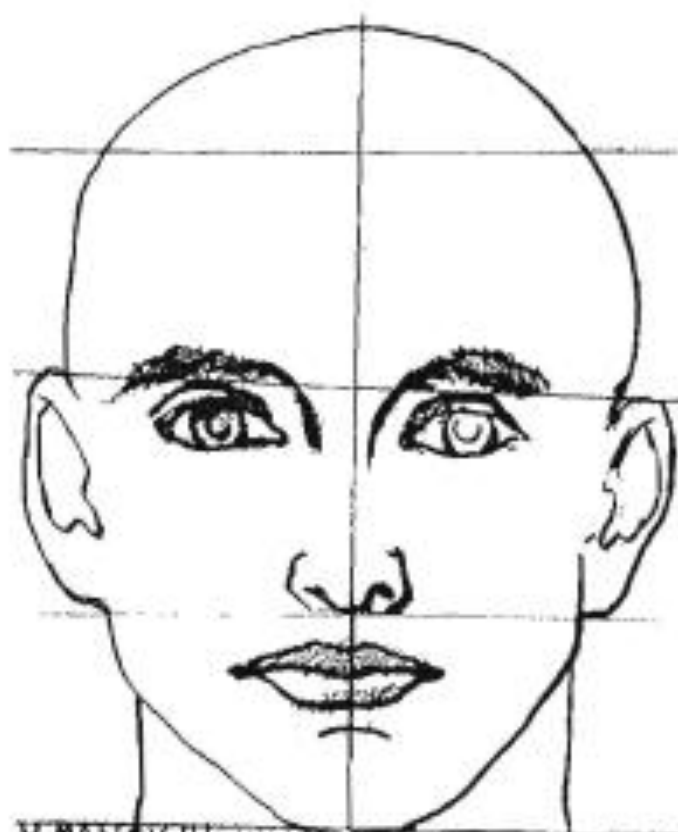
GLOSSARY:

full-face
medium
portrait
profile

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES:

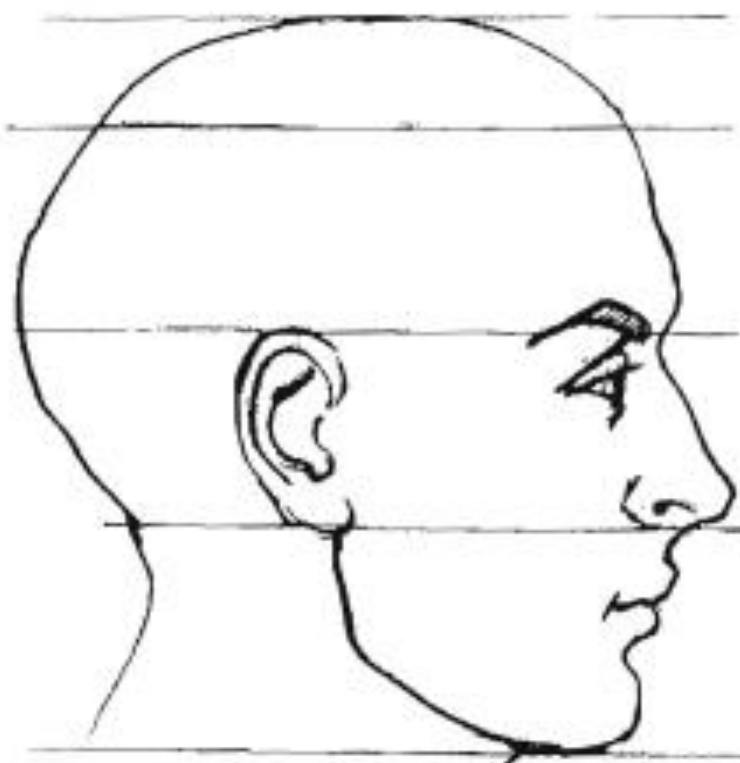
1. Discuss the relationships between features using the "Mathematical Proportions of the Human Head" worksheet.
2. Discuss how individual characteristics (shape and size of eyes, nose, mouth, ears, etc.) describe a person's unique features and identity.
3. Have students to work in pairs. With their chosen **medium**, ask them to observe their partner and draw exactly what they see, following the basic rules of proportion. (They should choose a **profile or full-face** view and begin by very faintly indicating the proportion guidelines on their paper.)
4. Arrange the finished portraits around the room and ask students to identify who they represent.

Mathematical Proportions of the Human Head



Full Face

1. The head is basically an oval.
2. The hair line is half the distance from the eyes to the top of the head.
3. The eyes and eyebrows come in the middle.
4. The tip of the nose is half the distance between eyes and chin.
5. The mouth comes between the nose and the chin.



Profile

1. The same basic proportions apply.
2. Placement of the ear is very important. In general, the top of the ear falls in a horizontal line with the highest point of the eyebrows. The earlobe is in line with the nostrils.



Reading 2.2- Cornish Houses and Gardens

Follow-up: ACTIVITY 2- Landscape Design

What did this rural and somewhat isolated community offer to these artists? Public transportation by train made it possible to get to Cornish (it was a long, nine hour trip from New York City and about six hours from Boston). For the most part, the artists came from busy, noisy city environments and were attracted by the cool summers, the possibility of informal and simple living, the tranquil countryside and the beauty of the landscape. They found Cornish an ideal place to work far from urban distractions. It was also affordable. Cornish was typical of many small New England towns that were losing their populations and economic base to the factories in the cities. Farmsteads and pastureland were either abandoned or could be bought at very reasonable prices. The intimacy of the rolling hills, the vista of prominent Mount Ascutney and the sweep into the distance of the Connecticut River valley actually reminded the artists of the beautiful Italian landscape to which many of them had traveled as students.

Daily life was devoted to work, but other activities such as gardening soon became a natural extension for creativity. Thomas and Maria Dewing are credited with bringing an interest in growing flowers to the community mainly because Maria was a painter of flowers. Stephen Parrish demonstrated his interest by incorporating a greenhouse into the plan of his home.

But Charles A. Platt (1861-1933), painter and etcher, became the renowned garden designer and architect of his day. He began his architectural profession here in Cornish by designing homes for his friends and integrating these plans with the surrounding landscape. Platt was introduced into the Colony in 1889 by his friend Henry O. Walker. Having studied and traveled in Europe, Platt was charmed by the design of the Italian villa with its adjoining garden. It was this model which he sought to reproduce in the Cornish hills. He was sensitive to the beauty and proportion of Classical forms and began designing houses with deep overhangs, classical **loggias**, columns, courtyards, and balconies while using local, New Hampshire materials. His architecture extended into the garden with formal, geometrically arranged flowerbeds aligned with the house. He created terraced lawns to tame the hilly terrain, walled garden spaces, used **balustrades** to lead the eye along pathways, and built **pergolas** to create sheltered, outdoor "rooms." Sunken paths, statuary, fountains and huge planted urns often punctuated intersecting paths. Again borrowing from Italian models, Lombardy poplars were used for visual accents. A sense of drama in the landscape was always present as he carefully controlled paths and driveways ultimately leading to "the view." In Cornish, this focal point was Mount Ascutney and the Connecticut River, carrying the eye into the distant valley.

As gardening became a passion in Cornish, it also served as a training ground for landscape designers. Two women, Rose Nichols (niece of Augustus Saint-Gaudens)- and Ellen Shipman went on to become important designers. The gardens of Cornish

became famous as horticultural writers began describing them in prominent magazines such as *House & Garden* and *Country Life in America*. Frances Duncan wrote this description for *Century Magazine* in May 1906:

Now in this matter of "composing" with the site, an artist, thoroughly familiar with the contour of the near-by hills and intensely alive to their beauty, may be less likely to go wrong in placing his house and garden than an office-bound architect. It is for this reason, doubtless, that Mr. Charles A. Platt's work at Cornish has been so satisfying. Mr. Platt was a painter when first he came to

Cornish. He had the artist's acquaintance with the Cornish hills long before he took up landscape gardening. His houses all compose well; in fact, the first house that ever he built, "High Court," erected for Miss Lazarus and now owned by Mr. Norman Hapgood, was almost perfect in this respect. Again and again one catches sight of the low spreading villa, its white walls, red-tiled roof, and tall poplars standing out against the sky, and from no point displeasing. One glimpse of it, for instance, from some three miles away, shows plainly the white curve of the road sweeping around the eastern end of the villa, and the two groups of Lombardy poplars which stand on each side of the drive are in precisely the right position- almost as if the house and its setting had been planned from that point...Mr. Platt's own garden is thoroughly characteristic, especially admirable in its proportions in its relation to the house and in its treatment of the view; for by that rarely exercised privilege, judicious thinning, a vista is opened through which one sees the mountains to perfection. Aside from satisfying the mere liking of the eye, the Cornish gardens are livable, lovable spots, on very intimate terms with their owners.



↑ Charles Platt designed "High Court" for Annie Lazarus, a patron of the arts from New York City. It was his first architectural commission and his plan is set up to take full advantage of a view of Mount Ascutney in the distance.

Compiled from: *Footprints of the Past*, Virginia Colby and James Atkinson; *Charles A. Platt: Artist as Architect*, Keith Morgan; "The Gardens of Cornish," in *Century Magazine*, May, 1906, Frances Duncan.

“What Have You Learned?”



Interpretive Questions: After you have completed “Reading 2.2: Cornish Houses and Gardens” answer the following questions either in writing or in class discussion:

1. What constitutes a "colony?"
2. How would you describe the people who formed the Cornish Colony? What attracted them to Cornish and what did they have in common?
3. Charles Platt has been credited with introducing a new interest in the formal garden in America. Where did he get his inspiration? List some of the characteristics of his architecture and garden designs.



Looking Deeper: Scenes from Cornish Gardens

Look at copies of historic photographs of Stephen Parrish's Northcôte Garden and other Cornish gardens from the May 1906 issue of *The Century Magazine*. Answer these questions:

1. How would you describe these gardens as "an extension of the house?"
2. What does "a built landscape" mean?

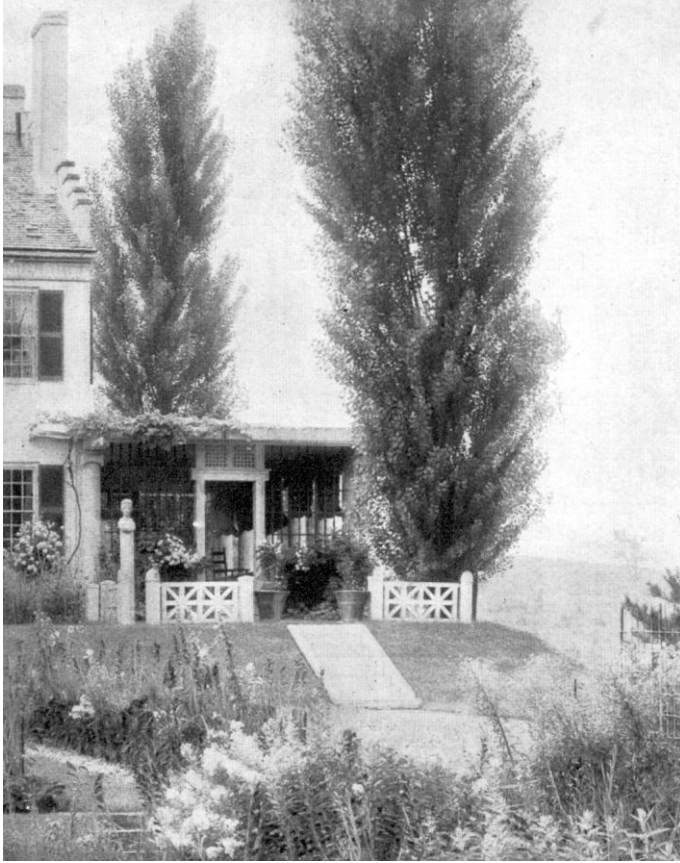


← Pool at "Mastlands," owned by writer and landscape designer Rose Standish Nichols.

→ A hillside garden at "Crossways" owned by the portrait painter Frances Houston.



← Balustrade and urns in a terraced garden owned by landscape designer and architect Charles A. Platt.



← Lombardy poplars on a terraced garden at “Aspet,” the home of the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens.

→ The garden gate entrance to “Doveridge,” owned by the painters Thomas and Maria Dewing.



Northcôte Garden, circa 1905- Stephen Parrish was a serious gardener and incorporated a greenhouse into his garden plan. Note other **Italianate** features in the garden including a vine colored **pergola**; planted containers; formal, aligned flowerbeds and a reflecting pool.



← View of “Northcôte Garden” from the south.



↑ The **pergola**, where the house and garden meet at “Northcôte Garden.”



↑ View of “Northcôte Garden” from the east.

ACTIVITY 2- LANDSCAPE DESIGN

GOALS:

- Students will learn to "read" a site plan, identify standard architectural symbols and understand and explain what is meant by a "built landscape."
- Students will use the Landscape Design Worksheet to color architectural elements.
- Students will learn about the characteristics of a formal garden design based on underlying geometric shapes.
- Students will assume the role of a landscape designer to create their own landscape plan using standard architectural symbols and a mathematical scale. They will use Charles Platt's strategies to integrate their home into the space and take advantage of geographic features.

Supports NH Curriculum Framework for the Arts Standard #4, especially: ♦ create a work of art that reflects historical and/or cultural context (Grade 8), p.40 and Standard #6, esp. ♦ use knowledge of other subject matter to enhance their art work (Grades 9-12), p.42.

MATERIALS:

- Sets of colored pencils
- Landscape Design Symbols and Charles Platt's site plan worksheets for students
- Compass, pencils, erasers, rulers with 1/16" divisions
- A large piece of paper for each student, at least 11" x 17" (vellum tracing paper is ideal)

GLOSSARY:

balustrade
exedra
loggia
pergola

DURATION: 1.5 to 2 hours **LOCATION:** Art or Math class

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Landscape design is an art form in itself. Remind students that beautiful landscaped gardens don't "just happen." Instead, a great deal of planning and thought process goes into creating a good design. Students may wish to review some of the Colony members who were well known for their gardens such as the Dewings, the Saint-Gaudens family, Stephen Parrish and the architect/landscape designer Charles Platt.

This activity is presented in cooperation with the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH education department and with assistance from Haynes & Garthwaite Architects, Norwich, VT.

Platt became a well-known architect whose influence was largely responsible for a new interest in formal gardening in America. Stress the fact that Platt controlled or "built" the landscape using carefully selected features like paths, terraces, stairways, balustrades, walls, and gates to lead the eye along. His special talent was to unite a house with its topographic site.

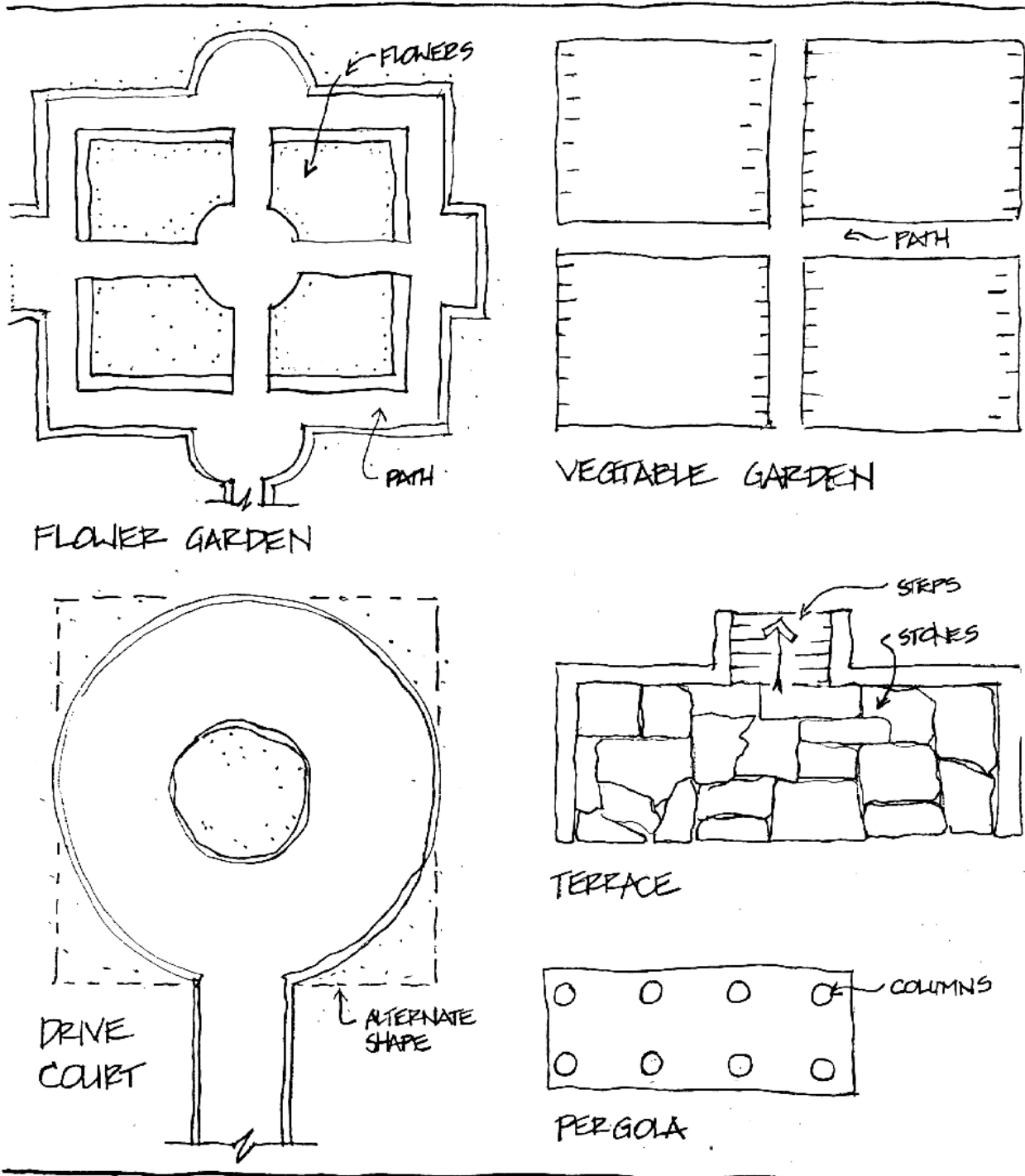
The gardens of Cornish became known throughout the country due in large part to articles published in national magazines such as *House Beautiful* and *Century Magazine*. Two other colony members, Rose Nichols and Ellen Shipman, became nationally famous landscape designers.

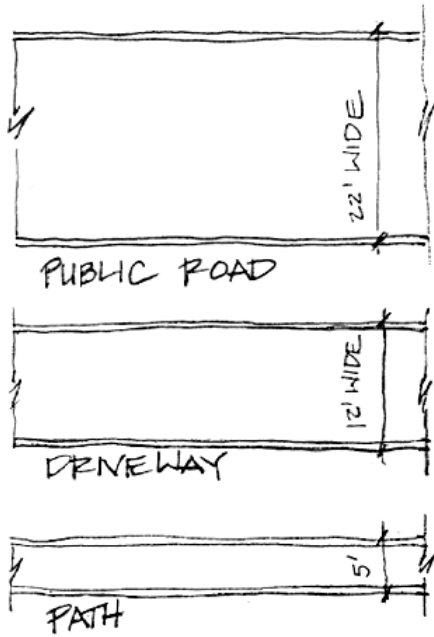
INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES:

1. Students should become familiar with the design symbols used by landscape architects to draw a site plan.
2. Instruct students to locate north, south, east and west on their paper and indicate any significant features (i.e. vistas, specimen trees, boulders, etc.)
3. Students will then outline the shape of the property.
4. Using the scale of $1/4" = 1'$, students will design their property using standard symbols. Be as creative as possible. Begin by locating the house and any outbuildings. Then develop the plan by including courtyards, paths, fountains, terraces, walls, benches, trees, gardens, pools, etc.
5. Students may wish to give a name to their "property" based on a person, the location, or after a prominent feature (some Cornish Colony properties were called "Butternuts," "High Court," "Crossways," and "Northcôte").

Activity 2- Landscape Design Symbols

These symbols are used by architects and landscape architects to draw up site plans.





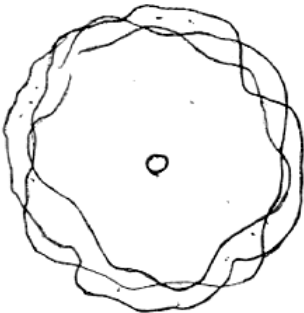
ALLEY OF TREES



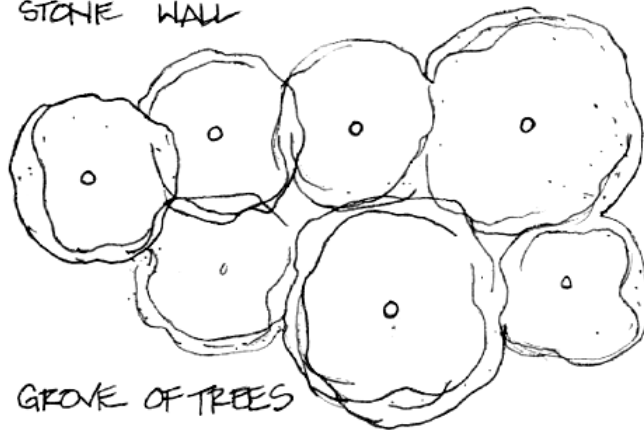
HEDGE OF TREES OR SHRUBS



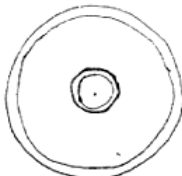
STONE WALL



SPECIMEN TREE



GROVE OF TREES



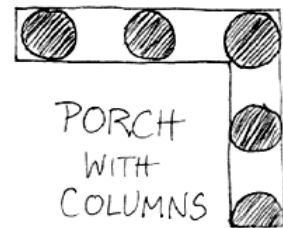
FOUNTAIN
OR POOL



STREAM



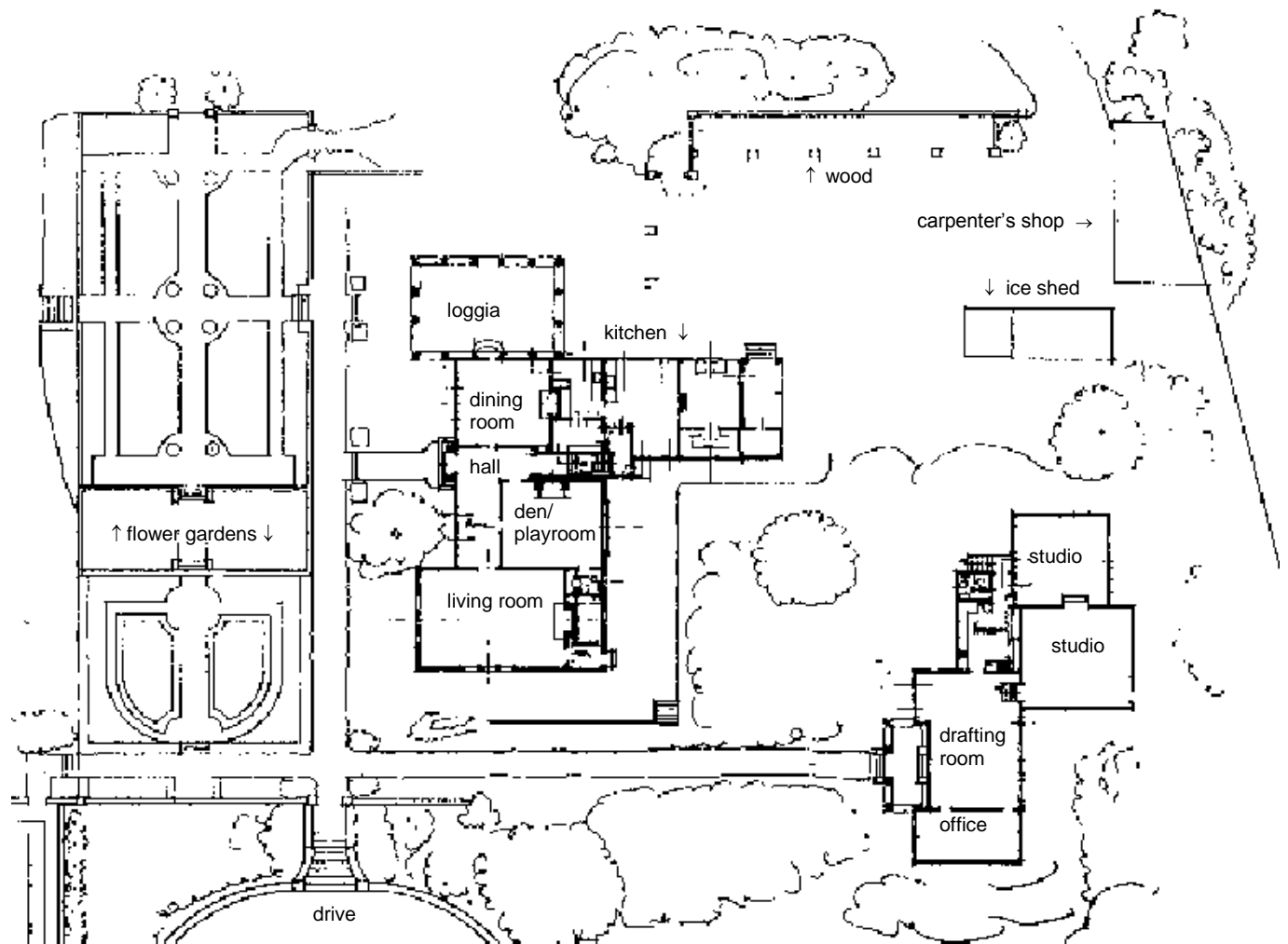
EXEDRA
OR
BENCH



PORCH
WITH
COLUMNS

Activity 2- Landscape Design Worksheet

This is a site plan for Charles Platt's home, studio and gardens in Cornish, New Hampshire.



Use colored pencils to color code the following parts of the site plan:

1. Dark blue for the house, studio and outbuildings
2. Pale blue for the loggias (there are two)
3. Grey for the driveway
4. Red for the paths and dark red for the stairways
5. Different shades of green for the plantings, trees and flowerbeds
6. Black for the retaining walls
7. Yellow for the planted urns and containers



Reading 2.3- Cornish Leisure Time

Follow up: ACTIVITY 3- Tableaux Vivants

Cornish Colony members respected each other's privacy. There was an unwritten agreement that no social calls were to take place before 4 p.m. These were young families, however, and recreation was important to them. Saint-Gaudens installed a bowling green, a swimming pool, a toboggan slide and small golf course at his home. The Colony was different from many of the other art colonies which were springing up at the turn of the century in that there was no formal school or course of instruction around which the artists assembled. On a social level, however, they engaged in a very creative interrelationship of the arts. Remember, there were no radios or televisions; entertainment had to be self-generated. This they did with great enthusiasm. Informal musicales, recitations and games of charades were popular. On a more elaborate level, theater played an important role in the community. Many members of the Colony were engaged in producing **tableaux vivants** (living pictures), **masques** (a pageant based on early Greek drama) as well as conventional plays in which the children acted.



Two views of Saint-Gaudens' toboggan slide.

Frances Grimes, sculptor assistant to Herbert Adams and Augustus Saint-Gaudens, has left us a description of the tableaux in her Reminiscences:

“... (Thomas) Dewing liked theatricals, and the artists gave short plays or skits that he composed and directed. For a time they were interested in tableaux, living pictures. A large picture frame was set up at one end of a room, covered with black gauze stretched tightly and so lighted as to flatten the appearance of the figures seen through it in the frame. Old masterpieces were imitated, the sitters selected because of their resemblance to the figures in the paintings. Costumes were carefully copied. Many of these tableaux were very successful; they were discussed critically, improved and felt to be worthy of the time spent on them.”

Today, each summer, artists in Laguna Beach, California recreate this art form of tableaux vivants. (See the copy of the article "The Pageant of the Masters," from *LIFE Magazine*, July 1997 found in ACTIVITY 3.)

We are fortunate in having descriptions, photos and original scripts for some of these Colony productions. In 1905, the famous *Masque of Ours: the Gods and the Golden Bowl* was created in recognition of the 20th anniversary of the Saint-Gaudens family coming to Cornish.

(This production represented a collaboration among the artists: a prologue by Percy MacKaye, the Masque by Louis Shipman music by Arthur Whiting, set designs by Maxfield Parrish, Kenyon Cox, Charles Platt and Herbert Adams.) A classical stage set and lavish costumes were made and more than seventy Colony members took part. (See *historic photo*.) A Roman style chariot was constructed and painted by Henry and Lucia Fuller that carried Augustus Saint-Gaudens in triumph across the lawn.



Stage set for the Masque.

A few years later, in 1913, Percy MacKaye wrote another original drama entitled *Sanctuary: A Bird Masque*. Produced in the neighboring town of Meriden, New Hampshire to raise money for a newly organized bird club, this play was subsequently taken to New York City where it attracted national attention. Its theme of protecting birds is one of the earliest works of art used to promote an environmental cause. (In fact, many birds were facing extinction due to demand from the clothing industry for their feathers.)

Theater was so important to Colony member Herbert Adams that he scooped out a little amphitheater behind his house in which many plays were presented. For one, Thackery's comedy *The Rose and the Ring*, costumes were designed by Louise Cox, the scenery by Lucia Fairchild Fuller and famed actress Ethyl Barrymore coached the children.



Amphitheatre behind the home of Herbert Adams.

William Howard Hart was another member of the community who was passionately interested in the theater. A painter by profession, he organized and directed many plays. Then in 1916 he offered to provide a stage for the town of Plainfield, New Hampshire, if the townspeople would construct the foundation. Hart then influenced his friend Maxfield Parrish to design a backdrop. Artisans completed the work. The stage, which still remains today, includes a distant view of Mount Ascutney plus six side woodland panels. Hart also donated the newest in stage lighting, which could create the realistic impression of daybreak to dusk. The first staged play was an operetta, *The Woodland Princess*, which was given on Old Home Day, August 11, 1916.

Compiled from: *Visitor's Guide to Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site*, National Park Service; "The Cornish Colony," John Dryfhout in *A Circle of Friends; Footprints of the Past*, Virginia Colby and James Atkinson; "Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site: Home of a Gilded Age Icon," James Percoco in *Teaching with Historic Places*; *Charles A. Platt: The Artist As Architect*, Keith Morgan; and *A Brief History of Cornish 1763-1974*, Hugh Wade.

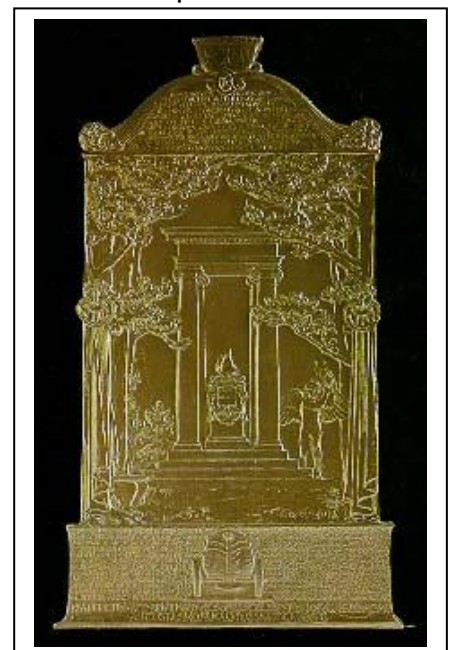
Masque of Ours: The Gods and the Golden Bowl



← Note the classical stage set in Pine Grove on the Saint-Gaudens property, "Aspet." It was later recreated in marble. Today, the site is known as the Temple, and is the final resting place of Augustus Saint-Gaudens and many members of his family.

- The original script and music to this masque were written to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the Cornish Colony by Augustus and Augusta Saint-Gaudens.
- The masque as a genre takes its origin from Greek drama, and is defined as a short, allegorical entertainment.
- The gist of "The Gods and the Golden Bowl" involves Zeus, king of the gods, who resigns his post. A new leader has to be found who is worthy of this exalted position. The honor is then bestowed on Augustus Saint-Gaudens.
- The play was an immense collaborative effort involving poets, musicians and over seventy Cornish Colony members who took roles of nymphs, satyrs, gods and goddesses. No text survives today, possibly because there was a great deal of ad-libbing and spontaneous merriment. Historic photos, however, show elaborate costuming, recreating Grecian dress and mythological symbols.

↓ Saint-Gaudens was so moved by the event that he modeled a commemorative plaque on which he included the names of all participants. He then reduced the plaque and presented a smaller version (3 1/8 x 1 3/4) to each individual who had played a role in the masque.



ACTIVITY 3- TABLEAUX VIVANTS

GOAL:

- Students will work in groups to choose and recreate a picture from the Old Masters. This will involve co-operative learning skills as the students select their picture and plan how to costume and stage their work.

Supports NH Curriculum Framework for the Arts Standard 7: Students will analyze, critique and construct meanings from works of theater, and especially • constructively evaluate their own and other's collaborative efforts and artistic choices in informal and formal productions (Grade 12), p.33.

MATERIALS:

- Several art books from which to choose a painting
- Costume material from the drama department or home
- Cardboard- enough to make a "picture frame" to frame the action groups
- A sheet or material mounted against the wall for background

GLOSSARY: tableaux vivant

DURATION: 1 class period to prepare and 1 class period to perform. If this activity does not take up a full period, a game of charades can be played.

LOCATION: Homeroom, with help from the Drama Department

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Review with students that lacking radio or television, the Cornish families had to create their own forms of entertainment. Friends would gather in parlors for board games, recitations, musical duets or charades. Another popular diversion was to create **tableaux vivants** (living pictures). The goal was to reproduce a work of art as close to the original as possible using costumes, gestures and sets.

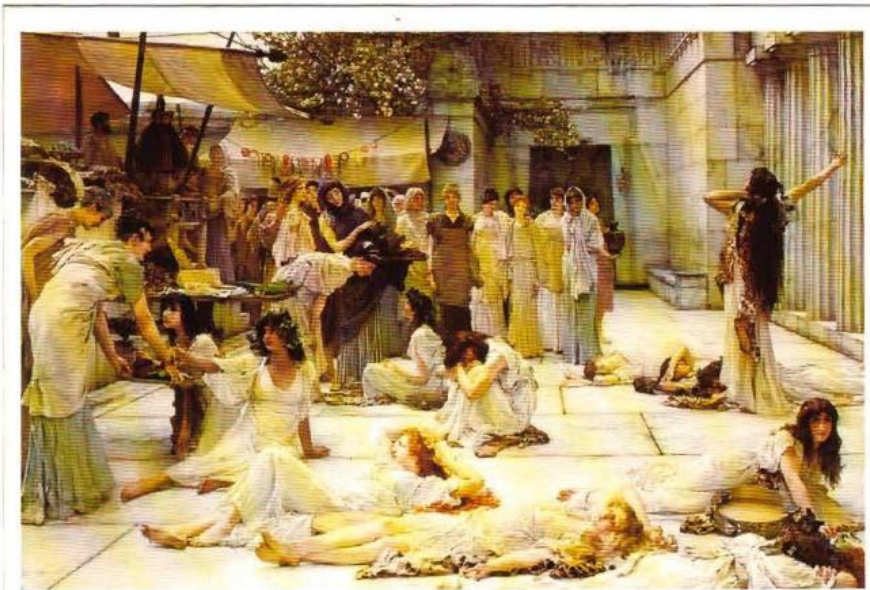
Reading for further interest:

- "The Pageant of the Masters," *Life Magazine*, July 1997.

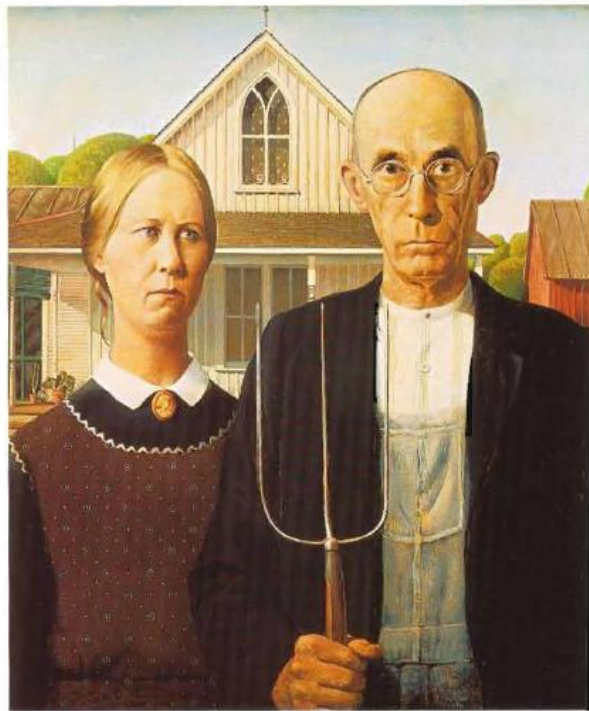
INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES:

1. Groups will use books or postcards to choose a masterpiece. Pieces with several figures work best.
2. Construct a rectangular picture frame, behind which the tableaux will occur.
3. Each group will present its tableaux and the rest of the class will judge how closely the group has reproduced the masterpiece.









■ LIFE GOES TO . . .

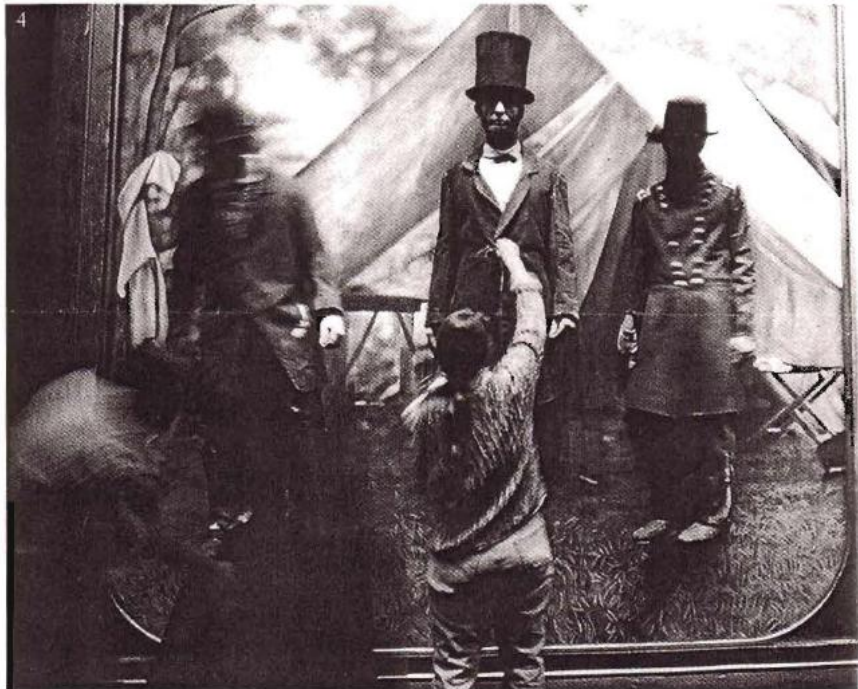
Life July

The Pageant of the Masters

Mortals become masterpieces as 400 people bring great art to life.

MICHELANGELO SCULPTED A MAN SO HUMAN he appears to have freed himself from a hunk of marble. Renaissance painters discovered that perspective allowed them to imitate the depth of their real-life surroundings on flat surfaces. So much of art is born of the desire to capture the essence of man or nature. The Pageant of the Masters breaks from this tradition and asks not, Can art imitate life? but rather, Can a man—of breath and blinks and unexpected sneezes—appear to be as flat as a two-dimensional rendering on canvas? Or as still and lifeless as stone? For the past 64 years, audiences at the seven-week summer pageant in Laguna, Calif., have answered, amazingly, yes. Here, for the first time in three decades, the troupe “performed” a photograph.

(1) Headaddress director Jenna Huss works on Larry Sill, who plays Lincoln's chief of the Secret Service, Allan Pinkerton; (2) Judas, Abe Lincoln, Civil War Major General McClelland and Jesus hang out backstage; (3) scenic artist David Rymar positions an actor during a rehearsal; (4) Matt Meddock (McClelland), David Schroeder (Lincoln) and Sill get a final once-over.



Photography by Richard Ross Text by Allison Adair

■ PAGEANT OF THE MASTERS

THE CHALLENGE OF RE-CREATING MASTERWORKS onstage is met by 400 cast and crew volunteers. Everyone gets into the act; small kids are especially useful in creating perspective. Founded by a group of artists during the Depression as a way to attract buyers, the show now draws 140,000 spectators. What the audience sees are 35 life-size reproductions so unlikelikey that even with binoculars it's difficult to make the eyes believe what they're seeing. They are not looking at Alexander Gardner's photo of Abe Lincoln or Da Vinci's painting of Jesus but at a doctor and a wigmaker as they pose motionlessly for two full minutes. (A deceived pigeon once perched on a living statue.) What audiences don't see is the yearlong preparation culminating in a backstage scramble to obscure the natural shadows of faces and clothing with makeup and painted muslin. Performers are then suspended on sets, so they appear to be standing in the scene, and wheeled onstage. Audiences also miss the jokes played by pageant veterans. The cast of *The Last Supper* have been known to hide hula skirts under their robes. So long as no apostles crack a smile, they can be as reverent about fun as they are about art. □



ALEXANDER GARDNER/THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM

Gardner's 1862 photograph of Lincoln is brought to life (right). "You climb into your set with no idea of the overall picture," says artistic director Diane Challis. "But then you see the reflections off the audience's binoculars—it's exhilarating."

